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ABSTRACT

A Swedish report on day care for children between the ages of 7 months and 3 years is summarized in English in this document. Preparation of the original report involved reviewing Swedish and foreign research concerning day nursery for the very young and conducting exploratory and evaluative studies of small children in day nurseries. Chapter by chapter summaries are included on: (1) child care in the community, (2) knowledge and beliefs concerning day nurseries and the very young, (3) pedagogics and the content of work with small children, (4) introducing new children and parents to day nurseries, (5) cooperation between day nurseries and family day care homes, (6) integration of different age groups in day nurseries, (7) parent participation, and (8) small children--day nurseries--and infections. (JMB)

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A DEBATE REPORT BY THE FAMILY AID COMMISSION.

DAYCARE

FOR SMALL CHILDREN

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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– A SUMMARY

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Preface

The following English summary of "Daycare for Small Children" (Daghem för små barn), a debate report presented by the Family Aid Commission, has been prepared in connection with the International Year of the Child, 1979. The aim of the summary is to bring current developments in the child care sector in Sweden to the attention of interested persons in other countries.

The Family Aid Commission is a Government investigating committee under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The Commission has paid particular attention to the smallest preschool children, i.e. children between the ages of seven months and three years. Two reports have previously been published, "Shorter Working Hours for Parents of Small Children" (Förkortad arbetstid för småbarnsföräldrar, SOU 1975:62) and "Parental Insurance" (Föräldraförsäkring, SOU 1978:39). The Commission's final report is expected during the second half of 1979.

The Commission has consulted Swedish and foreign studies concerning day nursery care for the very young. We have also conducted our own exploratory and evaluative studies of small children in day nurseries. These studies have included investigations of early social play among small children, projects for the mixed age groups comprising children between seven months and twelve years of age, and projects for new forms of parental participation in day nursery activities. We have begun to document the experience accumulated by various municipalities in breaking the isolation of the family day care. We have also collected material and viewpoints concerning the best procedure for dealing with minor ailments among children in the day nursery.

The Family Aid Commission is comprised of a group of experts representing various interests in society, a research group and a secretariat responsible for the compilation of psychological, sociological, medical and educational findings into a final report.

Stockholm, January 1979

Camilla Odhnoff
Chairman of the Family Aid Commission

Daycare for small children

A summary

The following is a summary of the debate report "Daycare for Small Children", presented by the Family Aid Commission. The Commission, acting in collaboration with the National Board of Health and Welfare, has conducted studies and experimental projects aimed at analysing the conditions for day nursery groups for Children between seven months and three years of age.

The Commission was appointed in 1974 and given the following principal tasks.

1. To investigate means of shortening the working hours of parents of small children and providing them with compensation under the parental insurance scheme.
2. To suggest improvements in the parental insurance scheme.
3. To examine practical experience concerning provision of good daycare for the very young and the educational feasibility and prerequisites of providing such care.

In 1975 the Commission presented its first report, "Shorter Working Hours for Parents of Small Children" (SOU 1975:62), containing suggested improvements in the parental insurance scheme for the loss of earnings.

These proposals were based on the following generally accepted demands and values in Sweden: the right of both men and women to work, the equality of the sexes, and the possibility of both parents to devote time to their children.

"Parental Insurance" (SOU 1978:39), presented in the spring of 1978, contained further proposals concerning alterations of the parental insurance scheme. These included an increase in special cases in the number of days leave of absence for the care of sick children. Furthermore, women doing physically hard labour were given the opportunity to take leave of absence and receive pregnancy benefits during the latter period of their pregnancy.

The debate report "Daycare for Small Children", presented in the autumn of 1978, summarizes the investigatory activities of the Family Aid Commission with reference to the question: What is good child care for the youngest children attending day nurseries?

We now wish to spread the findings acquired by the Commission and to discuss these with child care staff, and with persons actively involved in politics, in the trade union movement and in local government. In this way we hope to elicit viewpoints, reactions and knowledge on which to base a final report concerning the care of the very young. The following is a chapter-by-chapter summary of the content of the debate report.

1 Child care in the community

Introduction

Swedish society has undergone great change in the past few decades. The pattern of economic activity and settlement has been radically altered. Mothers of small children have now entered the labour market, sharing economic responsibility with their husbands. In 1967 about 30 per cent of all mothers of children under three years were employed. The corresponding figure ten years later, in 1977, was over 60 per cent.

In families where both parents are employed, the father is less likely to be excluded from the practical and emotional aspects of child care. It is important that men acquire practical experience of small children and that mothers of small children participate in various activities in the community. If we are to create a society which is good for both children and adults, we must have working people and policy makers with first-hand knowledge of children.

Sweden has about 760 000 children of pre-school age. There are long waiting lists for municipal child care. Full-time municipal child care comprises day nurseries and family day care homes. Their numbers have greatly expanded since 1965. Between 1965 and 1978, the number of day nursery places rose from 12 000 to more than 100 000 so that by the end of this period 14 per cent of all children under seven years old had nursery places and about 60 000 or 8 per cent had municipal family day care places. (The latest statistic available jan. 1979.)

In many municipalities the greatest demand for day nursery places at present is for children under three. Mothers of children under three years old are employed to nearly the same extent as mothers of older pre-school children. Only 6 per cent however of the children under three had day nursery places and only 7 per cent had family day care places. At the same time there are no reliable data concerning the nature and quality of the care provided for the children who lack municipal places. Private day care mothers, babysitters and relatives probably account for a large proportion of private child care. In other cases parents work shifts and take turns being at home. The day care waiting lists are clear evidence of the need for more reliable child care and child care of better quality.

One of the most conspicuous traits of contemporary society is the lack of social network in the local community. Developments in both working life and housing have led to disintegration of networks of social contacts. Housing accomodation and settlement today are no longer governed by common background, ties of friendship and bonds of locality.

Consequently large numbers of children grow up in urban surroundings where their families live anonymously and in isolation. These children are often wholly dependent for their social and emotional development on the stimulation which a single adult is capable of giving them. Many first-time parents lack personal experience and knowledge of small children. When difficulties occur, they often have no assistance or support in their immediate surroundings. This is particularly the case when children are very small and parents most tied to the home. At the same time, it is during these very first years of life that the foundation of a child's relationship with its parents is laid. Therefore the difficulties encountered by parents during this period have very far-reaching consequences.

In view of the developments in society generally, we believe that day nurseries can provide the majority of children with a valuable complement to their home environment, whether their parents are employed or not. This also applies to very young children.

The importance of early and varied social experiences has long been overlooked. It is only since the network of social contacts existing in the traditional local community virtually disappeared that people have begun to realize how much it meant to children.

We also know that day nurseries can play an important part in the lives of parents. The parents of children attending the day nursery have many common problems and interests. Through the day nursery, parents have an opportunity of co-operating in common concerns, even concerns aside from those that relate to their children.

These social experiences of participation and belonging are vital for the quality of life for children and adults alike.

One of the aims of child care is to compensate inequalities during childhood, but there are problems involved here. Unless special measures are provided by municipal authorities, child care services are liable to enlarge differences between the environments in which children are brought up. It is often difficult to recruit staff, especially trained staff, in housing areas with problems. Areas of this kind have a high rate of child and staff turnover because people move in and out. What is more, statistics show that children from low-income-families spend more time at day nurseries than children from other social classes. Day nurseries in low-income areas need extra resources from the very outset. In municipalities

where the expansion of child care has lagged behind, places are only awarded to children with priority, and this can also aggravate problems of various kinds.

The aim of counterbalancing differences in the developmental circumstances of children also demands changes in working life which would give all parents the right and the resources to devote the necessary amount of time to their children. Both for the sake of the children and for the sake of educational work in day nurseries, the parental insurance scheme needs to be expanded in such a way as to enable parents of small children to work shorter hours during the first years of their children's lives.

2 Knowledge and belief concerning day nurseries and the very young

In discussions concerning the pros and cons of day nursery care in Sweden, the arguments have been taken from a wide variety of spheres. The viewpoints presented have been economic, social and of many other kinds, but the psychological and medical arguments have carried particular weight where the very youngest children are concerned. It is therefore important to inform of current psychological and medical knowledge.

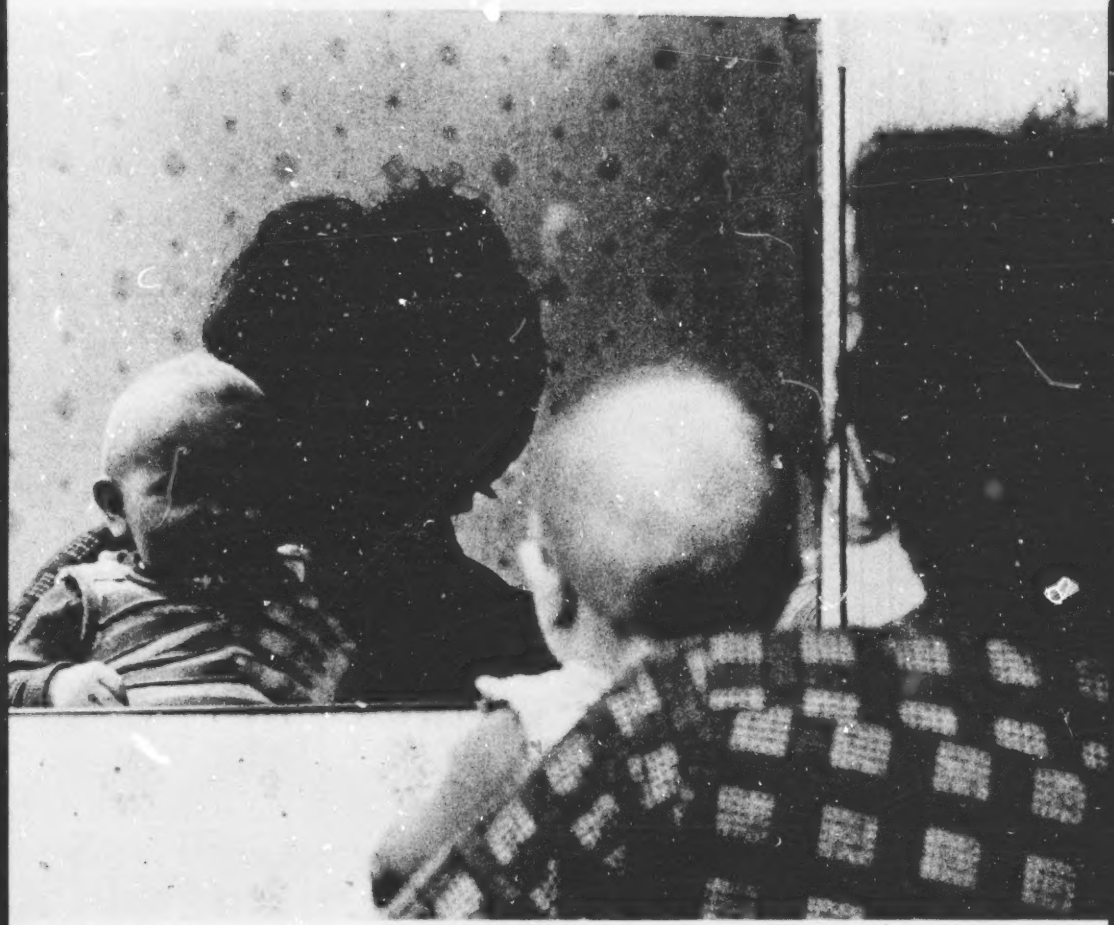
There are many factors determining whether day nurseries are good for children, for parents, for the staff and for society in general. The effects of day nursery attendance are dependent among other things on the number of children in the day nursery, the size of the child group, the length of time the children spend in the day nursery, which children attend the day nursery, the nature of the physical environment, the play and educational material available for the children, the objectives of the work, the way in which the staff is recruited, the role allotted to them, their training and numbers, opportunities of parental participation and so on.

In most of the studies which have been published concerning day nursery children in various countries, proper descriptions of all these various factors are lacking. Day nursery attendance in Sweden, where for example personnel density is twice that of most other countries and where the physical environment and the play materials are of superb quality, is something else than attending day nurseries which are less well staffed and less well equipped.

To summarize the present standpoints of psychological and medical knowledge concerning day nursery attendance, the debate report puts five questions which are then answered in the light of available research findings. These questions and answers are as follows.

Question 1. Is it true that mother is the only person who plays a really important part in the development of the small child?

No. There is nothing to prove that the maternal relationship has such a crucial bearing on the child's development. Some recent investigations suggest that when children are only a few months



old, they already can have and often do have important relationships with several persons. It is clear that small children have a great need to be part of stable and warm interactions with people who are emotionally attached to them and care about them, and that this interaction with loved ones needs to be of a lasting nature. The biological relationship between these persons and the infant is not important. The important thing is for the persons concerned to interact with the child in such a way that a lasting relationship can be established.

Question 2. Is it true that small children do not have any enjoyment out of being with other children?

No. Small children appreciate the company of other children, and their development is enhanced by it. Studies carried out during the past ten or fifteen years unanimously suggest that even very small children establish social relationships with each other and benefit from associating with each other. Like other human beings, however, children need to get to know each other, they need to have positive expectations concerning interaction with others and they need to be in a situation where social interaction is both possible and desirable.

If it were not for the powerful influence still exerted by earlier research findings, day nursery staff, parents and family day care mothers would have less difficulty in spotting social behaviour among the very young. The interest and happiness which even very small children display in their contacts with other children ought to give rise to the realization that associating with other children is of educational importance and that day nurseries can be a resource even for the youngest children.

Question 3. Is it true that orphanages have been harmful to small children?

Yes. The orphanages of the past could be harmful to small children. The children did not have the same opportunities of mental development as other children, and their physical health was inferior. It would be absurd, however, to translate this fact into conclusions concerning day nurseries. Orphanage children were often faced with critical situations in which they were separated from their parents, and as a rule orphanages did not measure up to even the most rudimentary educational requirements.

Question 4. Is it true that day nurseries impair the mental development of the very young?

There are no studies to indicate that the mental development of small children is impaired by day nursery attendance, assuming the day nursery functions properly. On the contrary, practically all investigations suggest that day nursery children are particularly favoured in terms of social, emotional and intellectual development and in the development of independence and initiative.

Research is now increasingly concerned, not with the pros and cons of day nursery attendance for the very young but with the way in which a good environment can and should be planned for the small children. What preconditions have to be met? What qualities are important?

Question 5. Is it true that day nursery attendance exposes very young children to extra medical risks?

Day nursery attendance does not involve small children in additional health hazards except in a limited number of instances. These particular children at risk should be identified through closer co-operation with child health services.

The proneness of small children to infection is primarily a practical rather than a medical problem. Parents are placed in a difficult position. The rules still applied by certain day nurseries concerning the admission of children with slight colds, result in day nursery children frequently being kept at home. We therefore feel that day nurseries, acting in consultation with the child health services, should apply more lenient rules of admission of children with slight colds and that municipal authorities should provide child nurses who take care of the sick child in the child's home.

3 Pedagogics and content of work with small children

In this chapter, ways of developing and enhancing the pedagogical work in the day nursery is discussed. How do we bring up children to become independent, knowledgeable persons, with capacity for solidarity and capable of together with others making changes in our society? It remains to be seen how this objective can be attained.

About half the day nurseries in Sweden have acted on the ideas put forward 1973 by the Commission on Child Centres and organized groups in such a way that about twelve children under three make up one group while fifteen—sometimes eighteen—children aged between three and seven years form another. Schoolchildren form a group of their own. Other day nurseries divide their children into four age groups, and a small number of day nurseries following the ideas of the Family Aid Commission have started groups comprising children between the ages of six months and twelve years. The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends a personnel ratio of 2 staff for 5 children aged between 6 months and 3 years and 1 staff for 5 children aged between 3 and 7 years. Some municipalities apply these ratios, others do not. The average ratio for the country as a whole and for all pre-school ages is 1 staff for 5 children.

Day nursery personnel in 1975 comprised 40% pre-school teachers with two years' training, 50% child nurses with six months' training and 10% untrained employees.

The sceptical attitude of the community towards day nursery attendance for the very young has done nothing to support day nursery staff or encourage them in the development and renewal of their educational task. Quite often the staff have regarded themselves as a "stopgap measure", and many parents have had qualms of conscience about "dumping" their children. The past few years have witnessed a change of attitudes towards day nursery attendance for the very young, and it has become increasingly evident that small children can develop in a positive direction in day nurseries. People have actually begun to notice that day nurseries may have something special to offer in the way of developmental stimulation and social contact—something which it may be hard for small children to come by if they stay at home all the time.

The Commission on Child Centres has played an important part in the development of child care in Sweden. The Commission described a working approach which came to be known as dialogue pedagogics. To many people, however, this concept has lacked precise content and has therefore failed to provide them with concrete and practical guidance in their work together with children.

There has been uncertainty as to the means whereby goals can be achieved and the ways in which parents and staff can help one another.

Dialogue pedagogics has been interpreted as a relationship between two persons and has therefore provided insufficient guidance and assistance for work together with groups of children. Staff has not been given enough support in appreciating the connection between the individual and the group. Emphasis on the development of the individual gives too much scope for an egocentric view of life. This chapter discusses part of the background to the interpretations of the concept of dialogue pedagogics and also part of the background to our views concerning the relationship between day nursery, group and society.

Our society promotes competition between individuals and prevents reciprocity and social action outside the narrow circle to which the individual belongs. Work and leisure are kept separate, as are private life and life outside the family. Our attitudes towards people are dominated by categories and age divisions, and this tends to widen the gaps between individuals and groups and to obstruct co-operation. Differences between individuals are emphasized and no scope is allowed for efforts to find the common factors which integrate and promote the whole.

The Commission therefore feels that it is important for the educational efforts of day nurseries to be actively aimed at counteracting these powerful social tendencies. It is important for the day nursery staff to try to give the children different experiences and different expectations concerning human relations.

Children who at an early stage acquire positive experiences of joint creativity, mutuality and solidarity in a group can enter new groups in a different way from children who have not had these experiences. Children who have experienced being able to influence what goes on in a group have completely different expectations and demands concerning new groups they participate in from children who have not experienced group participation on such terms.

We believe that a deliberate educational approach in day nurseries

can lay the foundations of expectations and attitudes to life which are different from those which many children today encounter in society.

Work in a team can be a model of democratic cooperation. To be able to set an example, the staff themselves need to be able to discuss, plan and participate in decision making. They must be satisfied with their own opportunities of influencing their working conditions.

At this stage of the discussion we attempt to show how important it is for the staff to see that certain children need an extra amount of support to be able to participate satisfactorily in common activities. Even very young children have different kinds of experiences of democratic participation in home life. Children whose home life has accustomed them to exerting influence and participating in matters of common concern do not need the same amount of support from adults to derive positive experiences of community life in the day nursery group.

One section of this chapter is devoted to another aspect of the things which children learn about themselves and the world around them. Too much scope has been given to play activities, handicraft and educational materials, while on the other hand everyday chores have been overlooked. Children need to feel that they are making themselves useful and that they are able, at an early stage, to participate and work together with older children and adults in tasks which are necessary and of concern to all. Adults who devote themselves to getting things out for the children, clearing up after the children, serving things to the children and keeping the children amused present a one-sided view of adult living and thwart some of the important objectives of day nursery activities. To a child, participating and working together with adults means being taken seriously, being competent and being admitted to the community. In this way adults and children form a single community together.

To participate actively in the group, children need to attend day nursery at regular hours every day. Parental working hours must not impinge excessively on this principle.

A section written by persons employed at three different day nurseries contains examples of deliberate efforts made in groups for small children to cultivate a sense of community among the children in each group. With a firm belief in the children's resources and their ability to function socially, and also with a positive view of the ability of the day nursery to enrich the children's lives, these staff members focus their work on giving children a positive experience of the group.

The three examples quoted here emphasize somewhat different aspects of the work of day nurseries. There is more than one way of bringing children up to be independent, knowledgeable and responsible. We believe that together these three day nurseries represent new directions of educational development. In all three cases, the emphasis is on individualization, group experience and the importance of early active participation in work and decision making.

The qualitative aspects of daycare are also considered in this

chapter. There are five ways in which daycare and families can complement and assist one another in getting children off to a good start.

1. **Permanent relations**. Like any other human beings, children need the experience of permanent relationships. When people know that they are going to live and work together for a considerable period of time, they see more point in helping each other, sharing things together, solving problems together and joining forces to overcome difficulties.
2. **Emotional commitment to relationships**. Like anybody else, a child needs to feel that there are people who care about it and are willing and able to enter into a close relationship. It is personal commitment that makes human contacts important and meaningful.
3. **Participation in a group**. Like anybody else, the child needs to feel that it is part of a wider context. It is important to feel that one has something to offer, that one is needed and that one is in harmony with others.
4. **A stimulating environment**. Children, like everybody else, need sensory stimulation. They need surroundings which will arouse their curiosity, their urge to explore and their desire to express experience, ideas and fantasy in their play. Children need to be able to test things in their own way and to acquire experience of their own.
5. **A balanced existence**. Children, like everybody else, need to find a rhythm of their own and to acquire self-knowledge. Everybody needs to achieve a balance between rest and activity, solitude and companionship, "the old routine" and "fresh fields and pastures new".

Are these requirements satisfied today where children in day nurseries are concerned? Yes, the great majority of the very young have an opportunity of forging lasting and emotional contacts of importance with people in their homes and at day nurseries, they acquire positive experience of group companionship and their development is stimulated. But it is abundantly clear that the quality of children's environments varies a great deal.

4 Introducing new children and parents to day nurseries

This chapter deals with the importance of carefully planned introductory measures. When a child starts attending day nursery, it needs to be able to acclimatize gradually to its new surroundings and to establish secure contacts with staff and other children at its own pace. From the parents' point of view, this is an important period in which to get to know both staff and children. Parents also need to become closely enough acquainted with day nursery working methods to be willing and able later on to participate actively in the child's new surroundings. During the introductory period, parents also have an opportunity of getting to know other parents.

A day nursery group admits many newcomers in the course of a year. This is what makes it so important for the staff to anticipate these introductions and to integrate them with everyday educational activities. Lack of co-operation between day nurseries and administrative authorities can often make this impossible. Closer consultation between day nurseries and municipal authorities is called for. For example, a group of day nurseries in a particular area could together assume responsibility for admissions and make the first approach to parents.

Opportunities for parental participation are also influenced by the basis on which services are charged for. In municipalities where the whole of the fourteen-day introductory period is free of charge, it is far more common for parents to participate full time. A clause in the parental insurance act makes it easier for parents to take leave of absence from their jobs.

A written presentation of the day nursery can be useful when parents first come into contact with the day nursery. In this presentation the staff can describe what they do, why they do it, what they want to give children and parents, and what requirements this entails. The written presentation also plays a very important part in acclimatizing new staff. It may also be a good idea for a particular member of the day nursery staff to be put **in charge of the introduction of a particular child**. In this case there will be a better chance of achieving continuity and coherence, it will be easier to rectify misunderstandings and the people concerned will have a better opportunity of getting to know each other. The

practice of introducing several parents and children at once has proved to have many advantages. It makes it easier for people concerned to help one another, and it can be a good thing for the children to share the experience of being newcomers to the group. Another advantage is that the group of children more quickly is brought up to full number.

There are day nurseries whose staff begin the introduction process by **visiting the family**. The child and its parents can then show their surroundings and reveal aspects of themselves which may be less immediately apparent in day nursery surroundings. Experience of these home visits has been unequivocally encouraging. Introduction needs to be **followed up** in order to be a useful aid to future co-operation. Parents and staff need to discuss their mutual reactions and expectations.

A new introductory period is very important when a child **changes groups** within the day nursery. This time it is easier for parents to present their own demands and viewpoints. If several children are transferred at once, this makes it easier for both children and parents to retain their sense of group identity.

5 Co-operation between day nurseries and family daycare homes

At the beginning of 1978, taking Sweden as a whole, 22 per cent of all pre-school children were enrolled in municipal child care, 8 per cent in family day care and 14 per cent in day nurseries. Figures vary a great deal, however, from one municipality to another. There are some municipalities where the number of family day care places greatly exceeds the number of day nursery places. Many municipalities do not have any day nursery places at all for small children. Family day care is sometimes claimed to be a more suitable form of care for the very youngest children, but for most people working as a family day care mother it is only a temporary occupation, and children often have to change family day care homes at short intervals, in which case family day care is not the secure and stable resource it is made out to be. Many municipalities today find that family day care is cheap for the simple reason that they do not invest properly in it. Day care mothers need training, materials, secure conditions of employment and continuous support and assistance in the discharge of their duties. Moreover, they run the risk of social isolation. Associating exclusively with children all day long can mean being deprived of all the stimulus to be derived from contact with other adults. If family day care homes are to be able to offer children proper care, they must be given resources to offer children an environment comparable with that of the day nurseries.

Some municipalities have launched experimental schemes aimed at breaking the isolation of family day care mothers and devising ways of linking together and developing the various forms of child care. Some of these experimental activities have been described in detail. For example, one municipality has attached every day care mother to a day nursery group. It is then up to the day nursery staff and the individual day care mother to organize their co-operation as they see fit. Co-operation of this kind has been made practically feasible by limiting the number of day care mothers attached to each day nursery group to two or three.

In another municipality the superintendent of a day nursery has been given educational and administrative responsibility for both day nurseries and family day care homes within a particular geographical area. The superintendents of two recently opened

day nurseries are to devote half their working hours to family day care homes.

In a third municipality, day care mothers from housing areas surrounding a number of day nurseries are allowed to use the day nursery playrooms at certain times during the week. Roughly fifteen day care mothers meet regularly in this way. Similar experiments are in progress in other municipalities, where efforts have been made to give day care mothers facilities of their own to use for various activities. In this way both children and adults have an opportunity of getting to know other people in the housing area and co-operating with them.

Results of these projects have generally been positive. It is important that family day care homes be made part of a working community so that their isolation can be broken and so that they can constitute an acceptable complement to day nurseries.

6 Integration of different age groups in day nurseries

The Family Aid Commission has conducted experiments with mixed age groups since 1976.

This experimental scheme implies wider age ranges in day nursery groups, with children between the ages of seven months and twelve years all forming a single group. This can be viewed as an elaboration of the ideas put forth by the Commission on Child Centres concerning groups for small children and sibling groups, the argument being that groups incorporating a wider range of ages would present a number of advantages.

So far the results of these experiments have been highly encouraging from the point of view of children, parents and staff alike.

Children

The children acquire more varied and stimulating surroundings. Play, relationships, language, movements, materials and tempo —everything acquires added content. The environment becomes less rigid and artificial when it has to cater to children of different ages. Children encourage and inspire one another in activities of different kinds. Children of different ages derive a great deal of stimulation and happiness from each other. It comes naturally for older children to help younger ones. A mixed age group presents different and better opportunities of co-operation and consideration between its members than previous group divisions. Another advantage is that in this way children do not have to change groups and adult companions several times during their pre-school years. Brothers and sisters can also stay in the same group.

Ordinary groups for small children often involve conflicts of a certain kind due to the children being of the same age. Small children, for example, need the same type of care and want the same kinds of toys. These conflicts are unavoidable in a way. In a mixed group, different children want different toys and the unnecessary causes of conflict are reduced. Another thing is that that younger children can see the older members resolve conflicts. In many ways the older children set an example for the

younger ones. Children in the intermediate ages acquire friends who are both much older and much younger than themselves, with all the pleasure and stimulation this implies. Schoolchildren derive security from being able to enter a familiar environment peopled by children and adults whom they know and have been known by for many years. In a mixed age group the older children can genuinely feel that they have something to contribute, that they can assume responsibility and that they can do something for others.

Parents

Mixed age groups also present many advantages from a parental viewpoint. Parents with several children need only have dealings

with a single staff group, and they do not have to get to know a new staff group because their children keep changing groups. In addition, the parental group in a mixed age group acquires greater stability, the parents have time to get to know each other better and they are able to present a common front and common demands.

Staff

Mixed age groups can make the work of the staff more stimulating and variable. There may seem more point in cultivating relations with children and parents when you know that you are likely to have dealings with them for a long time to come. Staff is also greatly helped by being able to follow the children's development for a number of years.

Social perspectives

The increasing division of society according to age, sex, education and other criteria has been observed by many social and behavioural scientists.

This division tends to aggravate alienation not only between the generations but also between people generally.

For example, rigid age groups can be a breeding ground of suspicion and hostility in relation to other groups. On the other hand, a teenager who has grown up in a mixed age group is more familiar with small children.

Several municipalities in Sweden (Södertälje, Tyresö, Nacka, Malmö, Kiruna, Ekerö) have day nurseries which have experimentally introduced mixed age groups on their own initiative. Preliminary evaluations have been undertaken. The experiences reported are highly encouraging and strikingly similar, although there have been great differences between the day nurseries with regards to both size and surroundings.

7 Parental participation

Co-operation between staff and parents has yet to find its proper channels. Both sides are greatly interested in wider and more meaningful co-operation. Present-day activities will have to be altered if day nurseries are to help break the isolation of families, counteract the effects of social sectoralization and inculcate democratic values among the rising generation. Parents today have limited opportunities of participating in the work of day nurseries, with the result that they are often shut of from a large sector of their children's lives. They have little opportunity of participating, exerting influence and discussing together with day nursery staff the norms and values governing the upbringing of their children.

We believe that better co-operation would benefit children, parents and staff alike. Greater activity concerning matters of importance to the individual is also in the interests of society, and it is important that other adults besides professional teachers be made responsible for and be enabled to influence children's upbringing.

Present-day research findings and practical experience indicate that existing forms of shared responsibility and participation are not sufficient to enable parents to participate on a co-operative basis in the work of day nurseries. The Co-detemination Act puts day nursery staff and their representative associations in a position to request negotiations on all matters concerning the staff's working environment. Parents have no corresponding means of exerting and demanding influence. The Co-determination Act is not fully evolved where workplaces with more than two parties are concerned—e.g. schools, pre-school institutions, medical care—and where third parties—parents, pupils, patients—are directly affected. To this must be added the parents' long working days. Working full time and also being the parent of a pre-school child is demanding in itself.

The development of parental participation in day nurseries would give all children in the group access to a larger number of adults, both men and women, of different ages and with different experiential backgrounds. These adults remain in the housing area during the evenings, at night and over weekends and public holidays. Adults who recognize and feel responsible for the

child outside the day nursery are an invaluable asset. In order to experience concrete forms of democratic co-operation, it is an advantage if the children are present when their parents question, discuss and help to decide matters instead of acquiescing in an established system.

Co-operation between parents and staff and between parents themselves can mark the beginning of combined efforts to transform the conditions of the individual, of the day nursery and of the housing area as a whole. A wider interchange of experience and knowledge will act as a form of parental education.

The social isolation of day nurseries can be broken by means of increased parental participation.

We have launched a scheme of experimental activities aimed at testing new forms of parental participation. As part of this scheme, parents and staff are sharing responsibilities and decision-making

powers concerning financial and educational matters. The day nursery has an outline budget, within which the parents and staff make their own financial priorities. The financial limits, however, are the same as for other day nurseries in the same municipalities. In order to be part of this decision-making parents need to be familiar with the day nursery, the children, the staff and the other parents. One way of acquiring this knowledge is to take part in the everyday work at the day nursery. The parents get the day nursery places for their children through the regular waiting list procedure.

Our experimental day nursery is a new one accommodated in a flat with a floor space of 140 sq. metres and designed to receive twelve children aged between seven months and twelve years. The staff comprises two children's nurses and one pre-school teacher. Each participating parent—mothers and fathers alike—has to spend an average of 1 1/2 days per month working at the day nursery together with the staff. In this way there is always one parent on duty. Parents can choose between working continuously for a whole week or working occasional days. The municipality pays the parents at the going rate for children's nurses. Another and perhaps administratively simpler way of paying parents for their services is to reduce charges at day nurseries practising this type of parental participation.

Experience so far has been highly encouraging. All the parents have managed, one way or another, to arrange the necessary leave of absence from their regular jobs. Many different occupations and income levels are represented. Only two parents have declined the offer of places on account of the compulsory participation arrangement. No comprehensive evaluation has yet been undertaken, because the activities have only been in progress for a year. Both parents and staff have displayed a great deal of active interest in this type of day nursery, and the scheme has also attracted considerable interest among staff and parent groups in other parts of Sweden.

We feel that one of the important tasks of this experimental scheme must be to test different forms of more direct parental influence in the day nursery. Several different systems should be tried out. We hope that the various experimental activities described in the section on parental participation in the day nursery will inspire staff and parent groups and municipalities to further experiments involving a greater assumption of responsibility by staff and parents. The wider scheme of parental insurance will make it possible for parents to take time off from their jobs, and participation in day nursery activities can be a good way of utilizing the extra days.

8 Small children – day nurseries – infections

It has been alleged that sickness absence, especially among the smallest children, is one of the major obstacles to the expansion of child care services. Medical surveys from various parts of Sweden have shown, however, that children in properly run day nurseries do not suffer from more serious infections than children in family day care homes and children remaining in their own homes.

It is true that day nursery attendance exposes a child to a greater number of minor infections than would be the case if it were kept at home, but as a rule these infections require no medical treatment and do not have any lasting effects. There is no justification for children with mild symptoms being turned away from day nurseries in order to prevent infection spreading. Preventive measures such as simple rules of hygiene and regular outdoor activity are probably a more important means of reducing illness. Measures of this kind must therefore be integrated with the pre-school educational programme.

Closer co-operation is needed between medical staff, parents and pre-school staff in order to solve the problems arising in connection with illness. During the 2—4 regular visits paid by a child health centre doctor or nurse to each day nursery group in the course of the year, a review should be made of the diseases occurring. In the course of this co-operation, common bases of medical assessment and common principles of medical treatment can be evolved on the basis of the experience gained from the day nursery groups. Special attention can be paid to children requiring medical examination.

By arranging regular health checks for all children at the child health centre and in this connection noting sickness absence and infection proneness among day nursery children, it is possible to establish a process of consultation between parents, pre-school institutions and child health services in the assessment of minor ailments. When the child health centre doctor or nurse attends parents' meetings at the day nursery—at least once every year—agreement can be reached on common principles in health matters.

Daycare for Small Children is a debate report from the Family Aid Commission. This English version is a summary prepared in connection with the International Year of the Child, 1979, in order to bring the current Swedish debate on child development and daycare to interested persons outside of Sweden.

The demand for nursery places in Sweden is extensive. The Family Aid Commission poses the question: What is good child care for the youngest children attending day nurseries?

The studies reported and discussed in **Daycare for Small Children** are investigations of early social play among small children, 0—3 years of age; projects on mixed age groups in day nurseries, the children's ages vary from seven months to 12 years; projects on new forms of parental participation and cooperation; projects on ways of breaking the isolation of family day care; medical documentation on procedures to deal with minor ailments among children. **Daycare for Small Children** discusses what is quality in a day nursery.

The Family Aid Commission has earlier published the reports in Swedish, **Shorter Working Hours for Parents of Small Children** and **Parental Insurance.**

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